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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 001976

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/20/2016

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [MA](#)

SUBJECT: PHOSPHATE CONVEYER SABOTAGED IN WESTERN SAHARA

REF: A. RABAT 1975

[1](#)B. RABAT 1963

Classified by Political Counselor Craig Karp for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) Moroccan press has reported that the long conveyer belt which carries phosphate ore from mines at Bou Craa, about 70 KM south of Layoune, to Layoune port on the Atlantic coast was damaged by a sabotage attack October 10. Press reports blame the Polisario for the attack.

[1](#)2. (C) During a meeting in his office October 13 the newly appointed Wali of Layoune, M,hammed Dryef, the governor responsible for the region including the mine and conveyer belt briefed visiting Embassy team on the sabotage attack (rest of meeting reported septel). He passed us several pictures showing that some of the support elements were severely damaged. He said the belt would be out of commission for several days, so that in addition to repair costs, there would be the cost to the government of the lost revenue from the phosphates that could not be shipped. Fortunately, this was in an isolated area and no one was hurt.

[1](#)3. (C) The Wali said the explosion was made of a shell (likely one of the many UXO left over from the long Sahara war) placed inside a tire. Police had detained a "perpetrator," who was being interrogated. They were also looking for another eight individuals whom they believed involved with the attack, which he blamed on the Polisario

[1](#)4. (C) Dryef noted that a similar incident had occurred about a year ago when a large knife had been inserted into the belt, which, as the belt ran cut itself for a verylong distance, before the problem was discovered and remediated. That incident had caused millions of dirhams in damage and lost productivity.

[1](#)5. (C) Polcouns noted that the U.S. government resolutely condemned all acts of terrorism. There could be no justification for such an attack, and he hoped that Morocco would pursue the perpetrators in full accordance with its laws.

[1](#)6. (C) Comment: The fact that the device was a shell, which could easily be obtained from the war remnants in the Sahara desert, suggests that this may have been an independent effort, probably carried out by Sahrawis, perhaps among the staff, known to have their own grievances, or by Sahrawis in Layoune, related to their "intifada," or the ongoing protests of the resident Sahrawis against the Moroccan presence and repressive acts associated with it. An attack directly organized or carried out from Polisario headquarters in Tindouf would likely have used a more sophisticated and destructive device. Interestingly, Dryef,s security staff appeared uneasy with the level of detail he provided (though the Wali declined to provide us a copy of the report he

showed us). Embassy will report any additional information we hear about the attack. End comment.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

Riley